

The Plays Before the Holidays

ALMA BELWIN
in
"ROADS OF DESTINY"FLORENCE REED
in
"ROADS OF DESTINY"DORIS RANKIN
in
"BETTY AT BAY"MOLLIE KING
in
"CENTURY MIDNIGHT WHIRL"CORINNE BARKER
in
"REMNANT"

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

MAYBE the time has come to "view with alarm," "sound a note of warning," "feel a grave anxiety" or otherwise indicate some apprehension concerning the decline and fall off, as Silas Wegg would have it, of the British drama in the United States. It is only those imported specimens which concern us, and indeed the quality of the supply on the London boards may be all that the population demands. But recent specimens exported for the entertainment of the outlanders indicate a "grave state" of something or somebody.

To think that the time would ever come when one would long for the reappearance of Somerset Maugham! But the present galaxy of geniuses engaged in supplying its wartime drama to the English stage sends the memory wistfully back to the days of Sutro, Jones—even in his present estate—Capt. Marshall, Vachell, R. C. Carton and the rest of the second raters. Probably we did not appreciate them highly in their day. But that was before the mad, glad, bad, sad period of Bertie Thomas, Douglas Murray, Austin Page, Jessie Porter and the other luminaries of the present day. Such real dramatists as Pinero, Barrie and Shaw are to-day almost among the unattainable.

Of course the decline of the drama has been going on steadily for a century or two. Everybody has read or heard that sad truth. The English drama has been sliding down hill so long that nothing remained but the bang at the bottom to show that the end had come. Without undue straining of the powers of hearing it seemed as if some of the English plays recently brought here for our entertainment made a noise much like that bang. To judge from the dramas lately exported, only one quality is needed to insure success in London to-day. Any play that treats of the war is evidently sure of enduring success. But it must of course be borne in mind that the reports of foreign prosperity of these pieces may be exaggerated. Eager Londoners may not in reality have thronged the theatre to see the works of Mr. Thomas, Mr. Murray, Mr. Page or Jessie Porter.

Specimens of contemporaneous British drama now visible are without exception founded more or less directly on subjects dealing with the war. They have so far been naive and amateurish on one hand or stale and inept on the other. Authors who selected themes which were known to be of stage value, such as Mr. Murray of "Perkins," left that old idea badly free from all novelty of treatment or felicitousness of dialogue or characterization. The other writers have been content to spin the dullest and most familiar yarns in the most uninspired manner. Such is apparently the war time theatre of London.

But it is not the theatre of New York at any time. The most expert of these recent importations is "By Pigeon Post," which is relieved by the novelty of the birds. But the first act of that play within a few minutes of the curtain is an excruciating dullness. "Betty at Bay," which is an amazingly naive product in a dramatic way, wanders its amateurish course with not the slightest intimation from the author that there was ever any such thing as a technique for the playwright. Bertie Thomas, in his play of mother and son and nobody else but the stage hands, has supplied seventy minutes of spoken dialogue with half the first act so dull that nervous spectators must hold on to their chairs to keep from screaming then and there. "Perkins" was poisonous enough to stomp such a skilful actress as Ruth Chatterton, make Henry Miller nervous and even close up the beautiful Henry Miller Theatre, which in view of its dramatists has been excluded from the gaze of New York theatregoers. Only the veteran Alexander Dumas enabled a few to inspect the tasteful interior of the new playhouse.

Where the Plays Change.

Robert Mantell's repertory at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre will be "King Lear," "Hamlet," "The Merchant of Venice," "Richard III," and "Macbeth." Engenie Blair will appear at the Standard in the famous old play "East Lynne." "The Man Who Came Back" will be presented by William A. Brady at the Shubert-Riviera with Laura Walker and Frank Morgan. Marjorie Rambeau will be presented at Loew's Seventh Avenue Theatre in "Where Poppies Bloom." David Warfield enters upon the last week of his extended engagement in "The Auctioneer" at the Manhattan Opera House.

Thirty-ninth Street Theatre by two plays which could not possibly have been accounted great successes. One of these was "The Long Dash," and before it passed briefly "Not With My Money." While neither was to be highly commended and both were more or less promptly rejected by the public, yet there were an inventiveness and spirit, a vivacity and interest in both plays which were denied to every English specimen recently disclosed. Indeed, repeated inspection of these examples of the English drama of to-day confirms the conclusion that the priceless charms of "A Little Bit of Fluff" were placed before us too soon. To-day we might accept them gratefully in view of the course of training in the British drama that local managers have so unselfishly arranged for us.

William Winter in his posthumous account of the career of David Belasco which is a just and voluminous tribute to the foremost manager of this period—indeed, the most distinguished figure in the theatre of this country since the death of Augustin Daly—traces meticulously the early struggles of this playwright, actor and manager. His unvarying energy in every branch of the profession—acting, adapting and writing plays, designing scenery, studying the methods of this great actor or that as a super, if no better occasion offered, arranging spectacles for ephemeral existence in San Francisco in the 70s—this was, of course, his unprecedented preparation for the task which he was to undertake later—for the task indeed which he is so brilliantly accomplishing to-day.

It is to be regretted that every admirer of the performances at the theatre under Mr. Belasco's control—and they number every connoisseur of the stage—cannot read Mr. Winter's book to see what a heroic apprenticeship the manager spent in their service. Those youthful years of unrelenting struggle and study, achievement and unsatisfied ambition, those years were really spent for the sake of the men and women who can go to the Belasco theatres to-day and say that if human perfection in any art exists it is most likely to be found here. Without the drudgery and the ploughing in such a hard field, without the sweat and maybe the blood, there could never have been such a beautiful flowering of the art of the theatre as David Belasco now shows to those who, seeking the best in that art, turn to his plays, his actors and his stages.

In "A Place in the Sun" Cyril Harcourt apparently struggles between a glimpse of the characters of modern men and women and a more or less

hopeless subjection to familiar stage types. The study of the young waster in the play at the Comedy is, for instance, altogether of the present generation—one might almost say of the future. He has been made by his education, which is more or less the education of his class in England, a worthless parasite, dependent on his father, unable to make a living and defiantly opposed to follow any other career in life. He proclaims his purpose to remain just as useless as his world has made him. He is not averse to making a profession out of being a thorough waster.

His sister is also the product of her education, and her rebellion against its teachings is just as deeply founded as that of her precious brother. She will show her father and brother how a waster should act toward the woman he has wronged. She will point their duty to them moreover in the most striking way. So she wanders to the rooms of the brother, who has been in vain struggling to assure right to his sister, and there indicates so plainly he cannot misunderstand her that she is not only willing but anxious to be put in the same social and physical state. It is at this point that Mr. Harcourt abandons his extremely modern viewpoint and turns the development of the play in the direction of his most conventional characters. Father relenting makes it possible for the waster's victim to dry her tears, especially as this worthy shows the eleventh hour repentance which turns him into the ordinary reformed villain of drama.

Although Mr. Harcourt's characters show such a wide variety in their rebellion against the purely conventional standards of British drama and despite deference to its most hidebound conventions, they are unchanging in one particular. They talk at all times the idiom of the author. This language is ineptly literary. The author plainly believes that fine writing, the verbose and the periodic are much more literary than any other means of speech for the men and women of his creation. To speak as they would in real life, to indicate character and motive directly by what they say rather than by carefully composed phrases has been thought more truly literary than all the efforts of which an uncultivated author may be capable. But Mr. Harcourt's children speak his own tongue under all conditions.

Florence Reed is a tantalizing figure in the American theatre and obviously destined to attain the post to which her talents and beauty entitle her in spite of rather than through "Roads of Destiny." She made her reappearance here importantly as the unhappy heroine of "Typhoon" with Walker White-side at the Fulton Theatre. Then Miss Reed showed her present gifts in a developed state, although it was predicted that she would be vastly improved by a sojourn in New York.

OLIVE VANDIAM
in
"NOTHING BUT LIES"

while the metropolitan stage would have every cause to be grateful for her presence. Miss Reed stopped in our theatrical midst and the result has been as her admirers prophesied then. Physically she is more radiant in beauty now than she was at that time, and singularly enough she looks more youthful in spite of the addition of these few years. She is gifted with a fine sense of pictorial effect and is fortunately possessed of an uncommonly fine medium for its display in her own loveliness. Her enunciation is clearer than one often hears, and every consonant in her method of speech receives its full value. Then she is always alive with the dramatic sense of the minute. Sometimes it appears difficult for her to hold in leash her participation in a scene, and in dramatic minutes she springs into the action almost as a tigress. It would not be possible to say that her effects are ever cerebral. But she has the dramatic instinct in the fullest measure and is a burning, vital figure in every scene. It may be true that there is a metallic glitter about the charm of the whole phenomenon; it is never coldly metallic, but the glitter of steel that shoots its sparks into the hearts of the spectators.

Without the least knowledge as to the original form of Mr. Pollock's play, it seems probable that the three or four characters enacted by Miss Reed acquired their importance through a distortion of the earliest scheme of the work. It is plainly the career of the youth seeking the crossroads of his life and finding always the signposts there that forms the theme of the drama. Miss Reed, playing the occasional temptress, has evidently been provided for as a star by increasing her share in the development of the story. It is possibly this change in the course of the play that has helped to add to its obscurity.

In referring to the operetta of Charles Lecocq in this country a correspondent writes: "Like many others I know I certainly did enjoy reading about the old time comic opera favorites in your very interesting accounts of Charles Lecocq and his works last Sunday. It took me back to the New York I loved, Venice Canale! What joyous memories that name revives! Poor Venice died far too early. I remember well the last time I saw her. It was at old South Broad Street Theatre, Philadelphia, where she was playing with Ella Weatherby in a piece called 'Hobbies.' Nat Goodwin was in the company, doing his imitations. So was Jennie Weatherby, Eliza's sister,

It wasn't very long after that that Venice paid away of consumption in Southern California, I think.

"I hope when you have the opportunity again you will give us some more about the old days."

Another correspondent recalls that Venice Canale in the last days of her career followed the example of many young actresses of her time and stepped from burlesque, in which she had made her first success, into the legitimate drama. The late Frank Mayo thought she showed signs of a deeper talent than her first field was ever likely to develop. So she joined his company and acted with him such roles as *Parthenia*, in which she was especially successful. But her career was cut short by death.

THE WEEK'S NOVELTIES.

The Ziegfeld Nine o'Clock and Midnight Frolics—At the New Amsterdam Roof.
Florence Ziegfeld, Jr., will present Monday evening at the Danse de Folies, atop the New Amsterdam Theatre, a characteristic new entertainment. The nightly crowding for four years of the Midnight Frolic has convinced Mr. Ziegfeld that there is a great public which demands delight of the Midnight Revue type without having to remain in the theatre until such late hours. To meet this demand Mr. Ziegfeld has created the new entertainment, starting at 9 o'clock, with girls, music and celebrated principals, upon the basic lines of the "Follies," which will close at 11:15 and be followed at 12 o'clock by an entirely new "Midnight Frolic." This plan permits of leisurely dining and a visit to the Danse de Folies for coffee and cigars with the "Nine o'Clock Frolic" and a dancing intermission before the "Midnight Frolic."

The entire New Amsterdam Theatre Roof has been transformed and redecorated by Joseph Urban. Mr. Ziegfeld has assembled for principals such favorites of the theatre world as Essie McCoy Davis, Lillian Lawrence, Fanny Brice, Bird Millman, Lillian Leitzel, Bee Palmer, De Lyne Alda, Eva Lynn, Georgia Price, Yvonne Shelton, Jessie Reed, Dolores, Martha Mansfield, Simone d'Herly and Bert Williams. Mr. Ziegfeld has gathered together for his chorus thirty-six new beauties, and he is confident they have never been equalled individually or collectively upon any stage.

To further diversify the novel entertainment Mr. Ziegfeld has induced Holbrook Blinn to produce and appear in a dramatic sketch with the holiday spirit called "Mr. Valentine's Christmas Supper." Mr. Blinn will be

supported by eight of the most beautiful girls in the company. Ned Wayburn has staged both the pioneer "Midnight Frolic" and the distinctively different new "Nine o'Clock Frolic." Gene Buck has written the lyrics and Dave Stamper the score. Joseph Urban has painted striking scenes in key with the novelty of the Ziegfeld conception. Danby's Synopetized Orchestra will play for both shows and the dancing.

Harry Lauder—At the Lexington Theatre.

At the Lexington Theatre to-morrow evening Harry Lauder will begin an engagement of one week before starting on a tour of the world, which he expects will consume about fifteen months. To New York playgoers the Scotch comedian's return to this country is replete with interest because of his recent close association at the front line trenches with many men of various New York regiments. Much of Lauder's new material has been inspired by events abroad, but he has retained a number of his better known songs in his repertoire. William Morris, under whose direction Lauder is appearing, has assembled a company for Mr. Lauder's support, and announces matinees on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

"Le Gendre de M. Poirier"—At the Vieux Colombier.

Jacques Copeau, director-general of the French Theatre du Vieux Colombier, returns to the French dramatists to-morrow evening when "Le Gendre de M. Poirier" of Emile Augier and Jules Sandeau will be presented. Henry Bosen, whose "Rommersholm" the offering at the French Theatre last week, proved to be one of the most successful plays produced at this theatre, was a disciple of Emile Augier, who, with Dumas fils, created the modern theatre play.

"Le Gendre de M. Poirier" is not new to New York, having been most recently produced here by the French company at the Century Roof Theatre. M. Poirier, a wealthy bourgeois and the father-in-law of a marquis who married to pay his debtors and live in luxury, represents the large body of the common people, who openly express contempt for the nobility, and are yet willing to sacrifice all their earthly goods for the pleasure of being called "my lord."

Miss Yvonne Garrick, who makes her first appearance at the Vieux Colombier in this play, took part when it was produced by the former French company.

"The Midnight Whirl"—At the Century Theatre Roof.

The new Century Midnight Whirl will open on the roof of the Century Theatre Thursday night. This will be one of the most pretentious of after theatre revues. The following

MRS. COLBURN in
"THE BETTER DIE"

performers are announced for the entertainment: Ed Wynn, Mollie King, Gordon and William Dooley, Charles King, Mae West, Jay Gould, Rosie Quinn, Rath Brothers, Frances Pritchard, James Clemons, Arline Chase, Paul Baker, Julia Ballew and "forty of the loveliest girls New York has ever seen." The production has been staged by Edward Royce. The music is by Harry Tierney and the lyrics by Joseph McCarthy and John Henry Mears. Gorgeous costumes are promised and new scenery. The performance will start promptly at 11:30.

To-night at the Neighborhood Playhouse the Festival Dancers will give their fifth performance of "A Festival of Tabernacles," with music and dancing, which has proved so popular that additional performances have been scheduled for December 14 and 15. There are eighty-six participants in this production in addition to the orchestral ensemble of ten pieces under the direction of George Barrere.

THE WAYS OF FATE.

Florence Reed is positive about her likes and dislikes. There can be little doubt, for instance, as to her joy in wild women roles. As to her ideas on life in general, she is so decided as to be practically a fatalist. This, she explained, is not merely because she is starring in "Roads of Destiny," Channing Pollock's play at the Republic, but on account of the way in which important events in her own life have shaped themselves.

First of all Miss Reed wanted to talk about her three roles in the new play, which, she explained, were built partly upon character motive and partly as instruments of fate. In the first act she tends a roulette wheel in an Alaskan gambling hall, where she is held in thrall by a brutal adventurer. Next she appears as a fluff society girl with adventurous leanings on her own account and lastly she is a servant whose mind has been affected by her betrayal.

The second part was the one which Miss Reed found the hardest to make effective, at least up to the point where her real motives came to light. The last impersonation, she thought, took everybody off their feet, for with her own foolish hair, as she expressed it, and that brushed back, and in such a lowly character, she was scarcely recognizable as the same person. Personally she liked the crazy girl the best, possibly because the role makes the greatest demands on her art. It is certain that she surmounts the difficulties of the part with great skill.

Taking the play all in all Miss Reed said that she found it one of the most interesting things she had ever tried to do. One of her greatest handicaps in the last act was the disadvantage of having to appear as a "scarecrow," which made every one against her, whereas, just before, she had made herself as beautiful as possible and came on the stage in a stunning gown. Originally there was a Mexican scene in the play which required her to change from a white skin to a brown one and back again to white, but fate decided that the scene was not necessary to its purposes.

All last season Miss Reed was Chu Chin Chowling with 250 camels and donkeys, to say nothing of Arabs, blacks, Hindus and Japanese. The Oriental spectacle appealed to her because, she said, she was a pagan of the Orient at heart. She had two years as a pagan in "The Wanderer," but that that was too long to stick to one part.

"It's the funniest feeling to be in a play with only twelve people," said Miss Reed, "and to be in a small theatre instead of in the Manhattan Opera House. Really it is a relief to speak again in a conversational tone and not have to shout at the top of my lungs. And it is always interesting when you can work in a small way to get big effects—a minimum of effort with a maximum of effect. In a big production you have to be at concert pitch all the time or you don't get anything over. It's like sitting in the front row or in front of the drums when you go to hear Wagner."

Miss Reed's first success was in "Seven Days." One of her most vivid recollections of the play was that the sister of the mother of the young lady she portrayed had a cat named Scluna. She scored a triumph in "Typhoon,"

which she considered one of the greatest plays ever produced. David Belasco used to send his players to it to see how a Japanese part should be acted, she said. Walker Whiteside was the Jap and the finest star, she thought, that anybody ever played with.

Miss Reed paused to puff her cigarette and seemed somewhat startled at the irrelevant question whether she really liked the wild women so very much.

"Ha!" she exclaimed with explosive enthusiasm. Her eyes snapped and a little smoke bomb burst from her throat with the detonation. "I like them the best of all," she declared. "They are so colorful. But they are not sympathetic. Nobody says 'Isn't she sweet? Isn't she dear?' And that's what they must say if you are to be a star. Abroad one can think more about art, but here one has to be a very nice person. When I played *Tisha*, the Babylonian vampire in *The Wanderer*, my milliner's mother came to see the show one day and as soon as it was over she said to her daughter, 'Dear, I do hope that dreadful woman never comes into your shop!'"

"The milliner insisted that I was a very nice woman, but her mother wouldn't believe that any one was acted the way I did could be nice or have decent instincts."

Fatalism seemed to Miss Reed a dangerous philosophy because it made people deny responsibility for their acts. What she meant by her belief in destiny applied to the great issues of life, and she recounted how she had to undergo a serious surgical operation when she was just starting to play in "Under Cover," and how it led to her taking part in the production of "The Yellow Ticket" in which she had one of the greatest successes of her career.

The colored scenes in "Infatuation" starring Gaby Deslys, it is said mark the highest point of achievement of the theatre arrangement in which the houses of Pathé was the pioneer more than twenty years ago.

The scene is a performance on the stage of the apocryphal Casino de Paris showing the "human flag," now reproduced at the New York Hippodrome. A company of girls mount a gigantic frame, and the arrangement of their costumes furnishes the color of the French Tricolor and then Old Glory. The rest of the brilliant performance is shown with its glittering ballet evolutions and groupings.

For faithful color production there were no inconsiderable problems to be met, but the lighting experts and specialists from the Pathé color studios at Vincennes figured them out to perfection with the cooperation of Director Louis Mercanton.

PLAYS THAT LAST.

Astor, "Little Simplicio"; Belasco, "Tiger! Tiger!"; Belmont, "The Little Brother"; Bijou, "Sleeping Partners"; Booth, "Be Calm, Camilla!"; Broadway, "Ladies First"; Casino, "Some Time"; Central, "Forever After"; Cohan, "By Pigeon Post"; Cohan & Harris, "Three Faces East"; Comedy, "A Place in the Sun"; Court, "The Better Ole"; Criterion, "Three Wise Fools"; Eling, "Under Orders"; Empire, "The Saving Grace"; Forty-eighth Street, "The Big Chance"; Forty-fourth Street, Robert Mantell, "A Stunt in Time"; Gaiety, "Lightning"; Globe, "The Canary"; Harris, "The Riddle: Woman"; Hudson, "Friendly Enemies"; Liberty, "Gloriana"; Longacre, "Nothing But Lies"; Lyceum, "Daddy Long Legs"; Madison, "The Unknown Purple"; Manhattan Opera House, "The Auctioneer"; Maxine Elliott's, "Tea for Three"; Miller's, "Daddy Long Legs"; Morosco, "Remnant"; New Amsterdam, "The Girl Behind the Gun"; New Amsterdam Roof, "Combination Frolic"; Playhouse, "Home Again"; Plymouth, "Redemption"; Princess, "Oh, My Dear"; Republic, "Roads of Destiny"; Selwyn, "The Crowded Hour"; Shubert, "The Betrothal"; Thirty-ninth Street, "Betty at Bay"; Winter Garden, "Sindbad."